

Editorial

Risk of Infections During Monsoon in Children

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Editor

Children are at the greatest risk of contracting gastroenteritis, diarrhoea, cholera and other monsoon related health threats from July to September and the main reason behind outbreaks of certain infections reported every year in monsoon is consumption of contaminated water and foodstuff.

It is time for parents to take proper preventive measures to avoid water and food borne infections and if they do not give due attention to the matter well in time, the monsoon might cause great rise to certain infections among children and infants.

The trend of infections among children is endemic; however, it may take shape of an epidemic with continuous rain spells expected ahead. The risk is greater due to rain spells because rainwater contaminates drinking water reservoirs at source and in supply lines even if there is no leakage at the lines. It is important to mention that the monsoon causes a great increase in number of child patients across country every year with increase in incidence of viral and bacterial diarrhoea, gastro and cholera.

The increase in rainfall in the coming days may pose greater threats to health of children and infants and it is time to make parents aware that they need extra care in case of children from July to September.

It is alarming that in Pakistan, nearly 250,000 children under the age of five die each year due to diarrhoea, mainly because of the use of untreated and contaminated water and unhygienic food. The water-borne illnesses account for nearly 60 per cent of child deaths in Pakistan with approximate 630 children dying daily from diarrhoea.

It is time to sensitize public on the issue and convince them to take extra ordinary care in handling children and infants. Awareness should be created among parents on the health hazards of monsoon asking parents to take extra care of their children for at least two months from now onwards.

To avoid diarrhoea, children should be given water for drinking after boiling while boiled water should be used for preparing milk for infants. Water to be used for children and infants must be brought to

'rolling boil' for 5-10 minutes otherwise it might not be safe for a child to consume.

On hygiene, mothers should wash hands with soap before preparing milk for infants while children should be made habitual of washing hands with soap before and after eating and after going to toilet. Fresh milk and food should be given to infants and small children each time and consumption of leftover food should be avoided.

There is a need of educating mothers on how to prevent monsoon related infections and how to react in case a child gets infection. Mothers should be informed that immediately after the incidence of diarrhoea (motion), a child should be given ORS (Oral Rehydration Salt) which certainly puts a patient out of danger. However as soon as a patient's stool gets consistent, the ORS should immediately be stopped as greater percentage of Sodium in ORS might harm a healthy child.

Studies reveal that in cholera, the watery motion resembles that of rice water and dehydration is much rapid as compared to diarrhoea. Health experts say that such a patient should immediately be taken to the nearest healthcare facility for treatment.

Cholera is an acute infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae* that lives and multiplies its colonies in the small intestine. Massive watery diarrhoea is the major symptom of the infectious disease that results in dehydration.

Such dramatic water loss, if left untreated, causing severe dehydration leads to thickening of blood, circulatory collapse (shock) and death. Studies reveal that a good number of cholera victims die six hours after onset of symptoms if not treated in time. Nearly 60 per cent of untreated patients die of the disease.

Cholera can be avoided by giving safe water (boiled water) to children for drinking and avoiding unhygienic conditions. The families should have a clean and functioning lavatory and open defecation on ground, in or near water sources should be avoided.